

What did the Buddha do?

Pondering on: What Did the Buddha Do? And HOW Did He Do It?By Khanti-Khema

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PART ONE:

Awhile back somebody wrote me about the subject of Materiality and Immateriality in the jhanas and what that meant and I got to thinking about a lot of things.

The question seemed to tap into some contemplation of mine that had been going on for some time and so I ask you to consider some things about the practice and more important to investigate them for yourself after you read this. For only your personal experience can verify what I am going to write about here.

First, a note. During his quest the Buddha discovered that our "ignorance of how things actually work causes suffering", so in this respect, Ignorance is at the beginning of our problem when it comes to suffering.

Knowledge helps us to find relief.

But one has to ask, Ignorance of what?

The Buddha found during his personal meditation investigation into HOW mind works and how suffering actually occurs that there was an 'impersonal' process going on which he later referred to as the process of Dependent Origination. It is verified for us that he investigated this before he was enlightened in the Samyutta Nikaya. He discovered within this process that consisted of 12 links, that the root of human suffering was at the link he called CRAVING. The Buddha witnessed the beginning of this suffering over and over again as it first appeared as a tiny subtle tension directly following the arising of a FEELING. This tension and tightness could be felt in both the mind and in the body.

The Buddha began to closely observe the links of CONTACT, FEELING and CRAVING as they occurred over and over again and came to the conclusion that this was HOW it worked. He found that Craving manifested or appeared on the scene as "I like it" or "I don't like it" following the arising of FEELING and that in either the case of attachment or aversion, there is a slight tension/stress. This point is where he also realized Atta or the Personal perspective of a self was a problem concerning suffering. Jumping into the "I , ME, MY, MINE syndrome leads to suffering every time. Jumping into the personal aspect of things, taking things personally leads to suffering.

The Buddha came to understand through his personal investigation in meditation practice that the beginning point of this tension happened when CONTACT arises FEELING arises; when FEELING arises CRAVING arises. When CRAVING arises, due to our habitual tendencies we proceed towards the "I" grasping or pushing away and trying to make or control the nature of the situation to be something different.. We then quickly move into arising CLINGING with all kinds of imagination, conceptualization and stories about why we like it or don't like it. Now, if we don't catch this and proceed from there, we move on into a non-thinking RE-ACTION. This is called the BEING link, but, what it refers to is our HABITUAL TENDENCIES to RE-ACT in the same way over and over again to whatever arises. During this process we struggle and suffer with tension as we proceed. We re-act the same way over and over again to similar situations without seeing them clearly on their own merit just as they are in any present moment. So we are stuck in the ways we deal with things.

Now as the Buddha was studying this, day in and day out, he found that in order to change our internal habitual tendency of grasping into "letting go" of the suffering, he should first commit to great Sila or Morality training. Why? Because in this way he could reduce his exposure to sensory input as he paid more attention to this and with less going on in his mind, he could then refine his practice by moving closer in to observe mind's attention and how it moves from one object to another as arising phenomena occur one by one. As he paid less attention to what was arising, just letting it be, and he brought back his mind's attention to his object of meditation, the breath or Loving Kindness, he realized that his interest in what was arising became less and less.

Problem:

It was true that if a lot was going on around him and many thoughts were coming up through many sensory contacts, that things were moving too fast to observe.

Solution:

If he set the circumstances up better for the experiment, then he could use a closer lens to examine what was going on with each arising feeling.

So the Buddha very carefully set up his area for meditation away from things that would pull his attention away from what he was doing. He continued observing the process while carrying forth the continuous practice of Sila . Outside of his sessions of meditation, He began to pay more attention to what was occurring in each moment, what he saw, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched and even thought as he moved about during each day. He observed how mind's attention moved towards any arising sensation at any door.

Within the suttas, concerning the practice of meditation, we have a great deal of information about what the Buddha saw and how he observed it up close. There is an excellent example of a practice of meditation that the Buddha recounts for us describing Sariputta's practice found in MN 111- The Anupada Sutta.

PART TWO:

There is another account of the Buddha's meditation technique of investigation found in the Samyutta Nikaya in The Book of Causation (i. Origination) that gives us a glimpse of the Buddha before his enlightenment, while still a bodhisatta, not yet fully enlightened, as it occurred to him to investigate and he describes his examination step by step, in order to uncover the impersonal process of dependent origination and how it is all tied together. His deductive technique of investigation can be repeated in a personal experiment performed by any one of us beginning at the same point and proceeding for ourselves in a like manner. We have his instructions right here.

These investigations were examples of sharpening the Buddha's awareness to a higher state of observation. The Buddha found that if he was aware of this ongoing process of Dependent Origination he had begun to witness all the time as it was occurring, he could then begin to see IF there was any possibility to break the cycle of the suffering.

There was! He found a weak point in the process where he could apply his volition [free will , make a decision] whether to embrace the next link or to abandon it, leap into it becoming more involved with it or let it go?

As he went about his practice, sitting , walking or whatever, he watched everything. Watched what? Watched the cycle of dependent origination during the day as much as he could. Now, without any worldly thoughts or worries, he found that he could do this even more precisely and closely. Going into retreat into a setting where one can do the most exacting pronounced, undisturbed work in advanced observation of this process all the time is the best way to get a handle on how to sharpen awareness to observe it. With the assistance of an advanced meditation guiding teacher one can effectively move along step by step. Retreats are set up so we can learn the art of this observation practice with the guidance of such a teacher who understands it fully. Then, we can take back this skill into our lives and continue using it. Retreats prime us for everyday application. The Buck does not stop at the retreat! This is an all the time observation technique. To understand how important it was to have a teacher who have seen and understands fully the process of Dependent Origination and can teach others, there is a sutta in the Samyutta Nikaya- Book of Causation (Nidannavagga) 82 (1) The Teacher. The Buddha's directive was to find this kind of teacher to learn the meditation.

As we watch during our sessions of meditation, but, more so, we watch during the process of our daily lives, we become aware of this Impersonal Process of Dependent Origination as it is happening all around us. We discover that it is a real process going on. It is not a philosophy. It is not hypothetical. It is a practical natural law. It is actually demonstrating for us how things really are.

As the Buddha observed through meditation, he found that there was a point of 'VOLITION' or 'choice'. BINGO! Upon coming to see this escape point, there arose the very core of Buddhist teaching: HOW to reach CESSATION OF SUFFERING? With loving acceptance of the present moment just as it is, let it go!

In Buddhism the Buddha taught only two things. He taught that one thing happens at a time. He taught suffering and the cessation of suffering. The Buddha had found the escape point at this link in his observation. He found it at the point of CRAVING.

Upon finding that there was an escape through becoming aware of the point of Craving and that, as we begin to see this point arise, sensing the mental tension and bodily tension as it approaches, we can then begin to let go! The Buddha had found the escape! He began to experiment for himself with this.

He began to let go of any slight aspect of subtle tension arising, earlier and earlier in the process, ceasing any liking or disliking. He began to tranquillize the entire body formation and mental formation. Then he observed what happen before that and before that and before that deeper and deeper seeing more and more clearly in time..

If there is no tension in the body, there comes to be a deeper and deeper tranquility! With each 'letting go and tranquilizing' of body and mind, NO THINKING OR ANALYZING OF ANY KIND, no conceptualizing or imagining beyond the present moment, the Buddha experienced deeper and deeper states. He entered the state of Infinite Space, then, eventually, Infinite Consciousness, then to the base of Nothingness, and then into the state of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception. These realms are called the immaterial realms because the tranquillization here is so great that there is 'no feel of the material body at all while in these states'. They are immaterial. So, this is the letting go of the material levels.

[Note: The only reason there is a sense of body is because of the tension we hold within our body and mind. Through schooling ourselves to let go of ALL tension within the body and mind, we reach a state of the non-materiality.]

The Buddha reached for continuous ongoing tranquility! He let go of the "I like it" and the " I don't like it" mind that comes up with Craving and he observed what was left was a totally pure mind! He re-discovered a natural law of movement occurring here towards stronger and stronger Equanimity as his balance gradually increased. He had transcended the prior state of tension and material being.

As the Buddha let go of all tensions and personal opinions at the point of CRAVING ; the "I don't like this" and "I want to make it/control it into another way", Or the "I want to keep it the same without change" (i.e. reaching for nicca/permanence/no change.) receded. By releasing at this point, he found that further conceptualization ceased to arise in the mind. Thus he had witnessed a state where CRAVING does not arise, CLINGING does not arise!

Hallelujah!!!!!! The Buck stops here!

It was seeing this and by the gradual letting go of this struggle with this tension and tightness that the Buddha tells us what happened next. He informs us though various suttas that we will "gradually" change our internal habitual tendency by first becoming dis-interested in the personal aspect of unwholesome things, then purposely 'dis-engaging from involvement in such subject matter arising, then move further into becoming dis-encharmed with the contents or stories, and eventually becoming ' dis-passionate about the subject matter, observing with total balance and clarity what remains. The perfect observer reaching a state of total balance. This is a gradual development in an ongoing practice.

PART THREE:

Concerning the meditation objective the Buddha teaches us that by removing our attention off of what is arising, if we will pursue this route of releasing what is arising, just letting it be there, tranquilizing as we do it, we will remain more and more in the present moment focusing only on what is real in the moment, or that, in short, we will BE IN THE NOW with a clear undisturbed mind's attention to place onto whatever needs to be done!

So all of our observation, all of our focus, and all of our training moves us towards this point further and further each time if we do not diverge from the practice. This is where MINDFULNESS, INVESTIGATION, perseverance-ENERGY, JOY, TRANQUILITY, COLLECTEDNESS, and finally EQUANIMITY come together in balance. These are the Enlightenment Factors that usher in the Awakening.

Often people have used the word CONCENTRATION instead of collectedness. But the meaning, as the Buddha did his meditation, was to establish a COLLECTEDNESS OF MIND. One uses a collected mind as we observe this impersonal process, seeing it evolve and gradually coming to change our perspective. This change affects our whole view of life. One moves to an " IMPERSONAL PERSPECTIVE as we see firsthand this impersonal process happening for ourselves.

Now, there will be some who will misconstrue these words of dis-interest, dis-engage, dis-encharmed, and finally dis-passion that I have used. Those who are very attached to being outwardly interested, engaged in everything, enchanted and prone to imagination and conceptualization won't like these words. Certainly they also fret about the loss of the word passion. They will say that these can only be pessimistic or negative states of being as a result. But this is improper understanding. They do not understand because of their attachment to their current ingrown habitual tendency to grasp and cling, pull and push things around in attempts to control them that these states bring with them RELIEF. The Buddha's message was to LET GO and discover the

potential of our mind in another state: Cessation.

Consider a moment before deciding for yourself. These states are not bad in any way. How could they be? With the removal of all tension, all grasping, all reaching for control and struggling, comes "CLARITY" and balance. This Clarity is a new kind of mind. It is a lovely thing when it is allowed to evolve fully. One sees colors now fully, one sees everything in new perspective without thinking about it and one becomes fully aware of the now moment. Truly one feels the RELIEF of realizing what is truly real.

Of course, during this lifetime or passage through this existence, all our sense doors are still fully opened up and operating, BUT, once trained, there is nothing but observation going on and there is full understanding of the process of Dependent Origination. With the personal verification of this knowledge through practice, through our own investigation, one finds great relief and everything in life is easier now. It moves along without stress for most of the time. If stress arises, one only has to "REMEMBER" (sati) this new knowledge of 'HOW' things work and then let go, release, relax and come back into knowing what is real and what is not. The time it takes you to do this becomes shorter and shorter with practice. Eventually it will happen naturally.

Now too, it is easier to smile. It is easier to laugh with this process we didn't know existed before. In this situation, the person, for instance, has no reason for any fear of surroundings or the heavy neediness of indulging in sense pleasures any longer, or things like that. Now we literally "know, see, understand precisely" "HOW" greed, hatred and delusion arise for they are only feelings. It becomes easier to let them go, not cling to them anymore, not feed them with our attention, expanding them without clinging. But rather, eventually, we do not have them arise at all or at the very least we catch the truth of them very fast, and let them fall away.

Now, there is less tension [suffering] that comes up now as it once did. One has let go of such stress.

So, in this way life has become easier. Life is accepted as just what it is, no matter what it is. This is development of the acceptance of things as they are and not making anything more or less of it. One now knows 'for sure' that anything arising can be let go of and there is no point in grabbing at anything or pushing at anything anymore because it will surely pass away. We are mastering where we place our attention and this is HOW you come to stop grasping at any of the signs or features that arise at any sense doors! You have made a decision to CLING TO NOTHING. And so you continue to practice!

So, relax. Live life and just BE HERE NOW, as Ram Dass so often said. We still have access to the precise instructions within the connected discourses of the Buddha of How to achieve this kind of understanding and develop this kind of practice.

What next?

Well, it would be good to continue to sit in the meditation and observe this for yourself. Become alert to why you are doing the meditation, what you are observing and how you can continue to release all tensions! Now this is a real practice that anyone can explain what it is, how to do it and why. Then carry that knowledge with you into your daily lives and use it. Be bold and live it!

As you do your observation, remember what you are discovering here. It is not the intricacies of what is arising that hold the key. Not the details. It matters not what arises but HOW it arose. What you choose to do with it [VOLITION] at the point of CRAVING is what is important. Release it, Relax and return to your object of meditation.

What you do in the present moment, dictates what happens in the future!

If one will attempt this experiment faithfully, the fruits are unbelievably good. But you must not change the recipe given in the texts! One can descend into the deeper states at will, by releasing all craving and clinging and just observing what happens next. One will be able to do this with the full awareness described by the Buddha IF the instructions are followed. It matters not a person's age who follows this path in earnest. The results can be the same for everyone who is ardent and resolute in this practice.

During this practice of observation one begins to get the hang of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking. We come to realize just what is real and nothing more. One comes to know that any feeling which arises, passes away.

The entire teaching is about:

Observing the movements of mind's attention in order to see HOW things work and eventually seeing for

ourselves only what is real.

Letting go of all conceptualization beyond what is real is the game here to be practiced with a light mind, a mind that is not tight with any tension. Keeping it light and laughing whenever you get caught, then starting again is the order of the day. This is a training for the mind to let go more and more naturally in order to live more clearly.

Be patient! You are changing an old habit to a new one. The old habit might be 50 or more years old when you begin to do this! Don't make it any more complex than it is. Just Release. Relax. Re-smile. Return. Repeat the observation. Just do it and see where it goes.

May you all reach Nibbana quickly and easily in this very lifetime.

Much Metta,

Khanti-Khema

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